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SUBJECT: OFDA VISIT TO MITWABA, CENTRAL KATANGA,  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Summary  
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¶1. (U) An estimated 29,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are present in several towns in Mitwaba Territory, located in the center of Katanga province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These IDPs are fleeing conflict between government troops and Mai Mai militia, and have to date received little assistance as the area is minimally accessible by road and has only a limited-use airstrip. Food, in particular, is in short supply, and malnutrition rates have been estimated at 30 percent among the IDP population. Non-food items are badly needed. Complicating matters further is the predatory behavior of Democratic Republic of Congo armed forces (FARDC) stationed in the territory. These troops, who have been in Mitwaba since 1997, and use their authority to extort food and items of value, and to abduct women from both resident and IDP populations. They are widely perceived as equally responsible as any Mai Mai groups for insecurity in Mitwaba Territory and ideally need to be replaced by a better-disciplined unit. Until FARDC pay and support is improved generally however, FARDC troops will continue to be a problem for nearby civilians. END SUMMARY.

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Background  
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¶2. (U) OFDA Rep Victor Bushamuka visited Mitwaba Territory February 24-26 to assess the humanitarian situation. During the visit, OFDA Rep met with military and political authorities, humanitarian actors including MSF-Belgium (MSF-B), Caritas, World Food Program (WFP), Action Against Poverty, (AAP) a local NGO, and groups of IDPs.

¶3. (U) Mitwaba Territory, located in central Katanga 466 kilometers (km) north of Lubumbashi, is one of the areas that have been most affected by attacks of the Mai Mai group under the leadership of notorious local commander Gedeon. Reports abound of villages being burned, civilians

killed and dismembered, women raped, fields looted, and other violations. This violence has led to mass population displacements to forests near the national park of Upemba, to Mitwaba Center, and southward toward Dubie.

¶4. (U) In November 2005, the FARDC forces launched an offensive on Mai Mai positions, forcing them from the area with little resistance. Shortly after, some of the displaced families started returning to their villages to rebuild their houses and engage in livelihood activities. However, FARDC troops in the villages were hostile toward the returnees, accusing them of being Mai Mai collaborators. Returning to the forest was also not an option for the IDPs, because Mai Mai there accused them of providing food to the FARDC. Many of these IDPs were forced to move for safety to the towns of Mitwaba Center, Kasungeshi, and Sampwe.

¶5. (U) The FARDC troops in Mitwaba are members of the 63rd brigade. Though they participated in the recent anti-Mai Mai campaign waged by government forces in Central Katanga, they are nearly all veterans of Mobutu's army, and were actually first sent to the area in 1997, well before the war between the Laurent Kabila government and Rwanda and Uganda began in August of 1998. Totally unpaid and unsupplied, they survive by preying on the local residents and IDP populations.

¶6. (U) Mitwaba Center is currently calm. MSF-B reports that Kasungeshi and Sampwe, the other major sites where IDPs have constructed camps in the territory, are also relatively secure. Though FARDC officers in Mitwaba state that the territory is now secure all the way to the Upemba National Park, and claim not to understand why IDPs do not return home, recent events contradict this assertion. On February 17, only one week prior to OFDA Rep's visit, Mai Mai elements attacked the town of Kalenge, 150 km south west of Mitwaba. Local residents remain unconvinced that Gedeon and other Mai Mai have indeed been neutralized, and also fear being attacked by FARDC forces. Most IDPs and humanitarian actors cite the FARDC as being at least equally responsible for insecurity in Mitwaba Territory as any Mai Mai groups.

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IDPs  
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¶7. (U) As of February 26, MSF-B had registered 29,000 IDPs in Mitwaba Territory. The IDPs are in 10 camps around Mitwaba Center and Sampwe, which is 105 km to the south. In Mitwaba Center, which normally has a population of only 2500 persons, there are already 11,000 IDPs. The number of new IDPs arriving averages 5 to 10 families a day. On February 18, however, 150 families arrived at once, fleeing a Mai Mai attack in Kalenga.

¶8. (U) The IDPs contacted by OFDA Rep originated from the north and west parts of the territory, and told of having been displaced more than three times in the past twelve months. They appeared to be in bad physical health and were barely clothed. Many children and adults manifested visible signs of malnutrition. Almost all of them said they had lost most of their belongings during their multiple displacements.

¶9. (U) The Mitwaba IDPs receive assistance in basic health care from MSF-B, which supports health centers in Mitwaba, Kasungeshi and Sampwe by providing essential medicines, training and supervision. IDPs contacted by OFDA Rep were generally satisfied with the services provided. Unfortunately, the referral hospital of Mitwaba was destroyed during the war and is not functional.

¶10. (U) In addition to supporting the health care system, MSF-B manages a therapeutic feeding center (TFC) for malnourished children and adults. Malnutrition appears to be very high in Mitwaba -- a preliminary study, while

clearly inconclusive because of the way the data was collected, suggested a Global Acute Malnutrition rate of over 30% -- and the TFC receives about 43 new cases per week. Unfortunately, due to the difficulty of delivering food to Mitwaba, there is no supplementary feeding program to assist children after they are discharged. As a result, relapses are common, representing over 10% of incoming cases.

¶11. (U) Non-food-items (NFI) including blankets, plastic sheeting, cooking pots, soap, and cups have been distributed to some of the IDPs who arrived before December 2005 in the Mitwaba area camps. However, due to a shortage of supply, not all IDPs were served, and not all those served received complete kits. In Kasungeshi, only soap was distributed.

¶12. (U) Caritas is planning to distribute clothes and NFI kits in Mitwaba. ACP will distribute UNICEF NFI kits in Kasungeshi and Sampwe. The kits are available in Lubumbashi, but a means to deliver the kits to Mitwaba has not yet been found. Due to the small size and bad condition of the Mitwaba airstrip, which can only handle planes carrying 3-5 tons maximum, air transport is prohibitively costly.

¶13. (U) Before the war, Mitwaba received supplies by road. The road from Lubumbashi, the provincial capital, to Mitwaba via Likasi is 466 km long and in bad condition. It is normally passable in the dry season, but is unusable at the present time due to the presence of resistant Mai Mai groups in the Kitenge-Mamba area.

¶14. (U) An alternative overland option is to truck goods first to Kilwa on Lake Moero, either using Zambian roads and a private ferry, or another, barely-passable Congolese road, then to transport the supplies from there westward to Dubie and Mitwaba. However, on this last leg of the trip, the road is in such bad shape that trucks can be stuck in transit for weeks at a time.

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Food Shortage  
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¶15. (U) A lack of sufficient food is the most urgent problem facing IDPs. Upon arrival in Mitwaba, most IDPs look for employment as general laborers to survive. Unfortunately, such opportunities are scarce. The most common work for IDPs includes fetching water for local people, assisting with house construction, and making charcoal for 20 to 50 Congolese francs per day (about 5 to 12 cents).

¶16. (U) If they do manage to earn any money, IDPs often still have to travel to over 50 km to obtain food. Though a few of the local resident families have managed to establish small farming activities around their houses in town, food is generally in very short supply in Mitwaba Center. The terrain immediately surrounding the town is too rocky to be conducive to agricultural activity, so the fields which normally supply Mitwaba with food are located at a considerable distance. Due to the great vulnerability of these far-off fields to extensive looting by FARDC soldiers, Mai Mai, and military predation on all pedestrians attempting to carry supplies into town, they are now largely inactive. What little food that does make it to Mitwaba Center comes largely from towns located many kilometers away on the main road to the south. IDPs in Mitwaba have begun buying cassava waste, commonly used prior to the war for feeding pigs, for use as their staple food.

¶17. (U) MONUC delivered 31 tons of WFP food by helicopter for IDPs the week prior to OFDA Rep's arrival, but the quantity was enough to assist only the most vulnerable people. An additional 88 tons arrived by truck March 2, after several weeks of travel. Due to a shortage in the

WFP pipeline to Lubumbashi, however, the rations include no pulses. Given the apparent high incidence of malnutrition, this is particularly unfortunate.

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Relations between FARDC and Mitwaba inhabitants and IDPs  
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¶18. (U) When they arrive in Mitwaba, IDPs are first screened by FARDC, ostensibly to identify possible Mai Mai elements. Many IDPs said that they were beaten during this process and indicated that the main purpose of the screening was really to rob them of any items of value. IDPs are asked to present their voter registration cards and are considered as Mai Mai if they do not have any. However, in the forest, Mai Mai often punish and even kill people they find in possession of a voter registration card, calling them government sympathizers, thus some IDPs had gotten rid of their cards during their existence in the forest to avoid problems with Mai Mai.

¶19. (U) Despite the dangers, IDPs have on occasion sent emissaries back to check on conditions in their home villages so as to better judge whether it is best to stay in the camps or to return home. Due to the animosity and high level of mistrust existing between IDPs and FARDC forces, IDPs in Mitwaba who have made such assessment trips are often end up being arrested and beaten if caught. This has resulted in increased reluctance to leave the camps.

¶20. (U) Since Mitwaba Territory is physically isolated from the rest of the country, the 63rd brigade has total authority there and soldiers can take what they like. Many of the IDPs who received plastic sheeting from humanitarian organizations refuse to put it on their make-shift huts until it is actually raining, since leaving it there overnight would make it vulnerable to theft by the military. Whereas the population once used bicycles to transport goods around, now most of the bicycles appear to be in the hands of the military. Women do not venture far from town for fear of being raped. All of OFDA Rep's interlocutors in Mitwaba were adamant in declaring that Mitwaba's security problems would not improve until this particular group of FARDC military were removed from the area.

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Conclusions  
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¶21. (U) Given the logistical problems of transporting humanitarian supplies to Mitwaba, it will be critical to identify ways to facilitate, as soon as possible, a return of IDPs to their home villages, or, minimally, the return of agricultural production. This, however, is dependent on the government's ability to restore security in the area. Though the Mai Mai problem persists, in the view of many living and working in Mitwaba, a key first step would be the replacement of the 63rd brigade of FARDC with a different contingent. Removing this group would also increase the impact of humanitarian efforts, since at the present time the value of assistance will be limited by the fact that the soldiers will in short time take possession of much of it.

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Comment  
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¶22. (U) MONUC essentially has no military presence in Katanga, and therefore has little to offer immediately to help address the security situation. A new MONUC Benin battalion reportedly may be deployed to the area, but its arrival in the DRC has been delayed, and the date of such a deployment is at best open to question. In mid 2005, when the problem of the behavior of the 63rd FARDC brigade was first brought to the attention of the Humanitarian

Advocacy Group (HAG) in Kinshasa, the group asked the head of OCHA to meet with military chiefs in Kinshasa to request that the 63rd brigade be rotated elsewhere. OCHA received assurances at the time that this was indeed planned and would soon occur. The 63rd is a non-integrated unit, and the Governor in Katanga province issued an order to the 6th District Regional Military Commander to rotate the 63rd into brassage immediately, which would mean their transfer to Kamina. The Governor, however, does not have command authority over FARDC forces. In any event, the regional military commander has just been ordered replaced, and it likely will be necessary to revisit this issue with his successor on an urgent basis. While the 63rd brigade appears to be a particular problem given its long stay in the area, the broader problem of a lack of pay and support to FARDC troops generally leads to predatory behavior by troops on nearby civilians. Thus a new FARDC unit might will improve the local situation at least temporarily, but does not provide a definitive solution. That will come through a combination of neutralizing the threatening Mai Mai forces, and the longer-term project to integrate FARDC forces and the EUSEC comprehensive program of reforms to ensure at least minimally adequate pay and living conditions to deployed troops. End comment.

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